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Linda McCulloch
Superintendent

March 14, 2005

Senator Conrad Burns
187 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Burns:

Federal funds are important to education in Montana which is why I greatly appreciate your efforts on our behalf. I recently sent you a letter expressing my concerns with the President's 2006 budget and its impact on Montana as education programs that are important to our children are cut or eliminated. At the same time a new program -- the Choice Incentive Fund -- is included in the President's budget for \$50 million.

The Choice Incentive Fund does not help meet the educational needs of Montana students. My concerns in detail are:

- School choice which is currently a parental option in No Child Left Behind does not work well in Montana. Our communities are small and many have only one school. Distances preclude parents choosing another public school, let alone a private school. Not many communities in Montana have private schools.
- Montana schools are already struggling financially. Reducing and eliminating federal resources that make a difference in student performance will have negative effects on Montana students. To provide federal resources that will create another school system in Montana will ultimately weaken education for all of our children. Montana simply does not have a large enough student population or economic base to support two publicly funded school systems.
- Most Montana schools are in a declining school enrollment status. This is due to a declining birthrate and families of childbearing age leaving the state, and thus, the need to "help school districts address their capacity problems" is not an issue in Montana.
- Our most recent No Child Left Behind Report Card that demonstrates 85% of all Montana schools made annual yearly progress is available on our OPI website at: <http://www.opi.state.mt.us/ReportCard/>.

I again ask for your help. Please maintain the programs and funding that help make Montana schools strong, high performing and internationally competitive. I have outlined these in my previous letter is attached. Please do not support the President's Choice Incentive Fund, a proposal which does not support the educational needs of Montana students.

On behalf of 146, 552 Montana public school students, I thank you once more for your continued assistance. If I can help in any way, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Linda McCulloch
State Superintendent

"It is the mission of the Office of Public Instruction to improve teaching and learning through communication, collaboration, advocacy, and accountability to those we serve."

cc: February 16, 2005 Letter to Congressional delegation